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ABSTRACT

The study of a foreign language is the study of another culture. Cultural involvement begins as learners progress from grammar to the actual use of language. Culture includes the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools of a people and influences both cognitive and affective behavior. It should be introduced as part of the total language experience, avoiding stereotypes and false ideas. Viewing the target culture by contrasting it with the native culture leads to misinformation and lack of cultural appreciation. Classroom communicative activities can include exercises on culture-related topics. These exercises can incorporate discussion or writing, comparison, listening, role-playing, reading, and conversation. Such activities can provide both interesting and useful cultural information to the student. (MSE)

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ABSTRACT

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Teaching Culture

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The study of a foreign language is the study of another culture. Cultural involvement begins as the learners progress from grammar to the actual use of language. Culture includes the ideas, customs,skills, arts and tools of a people and influences both cognitive and affective behavior. Culture should be introduced as part of the total language experience avoiding stereotypes and false ideas. Culture- based activities are presented that work well in a communication-based language course since they are integrated into the overall goals of proficiency skill development.

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TEACHING CULTURE

From the very first word, the study of a foreign language or of English as a second language is the study of another culture. "Cultural involvement begins as soon as the student, at even the most elementary level, moves from the analysis of language to language use."(Crawford-Lange and Lange ,140) Culture includes the characteristics of a society in any given place and time comprising ideas, art, literature,tools,skills,customs and sense of morality. Culture forms a grid or blueprint for a person to exist in a society and interact with other individuals.(see Brown,(1) ,123). Language is more than words; it is topics,functions and a world view.

Contrastive Cultures

One tends to view the target culture through the native cognitive matrix. The resulting comparisons and contrasts lead to misinformation and lack of cultural appreciation:

> Often erroneous and offensive to those described, stereotypes must be recognized by students as non-generalizable, often uninformed, and always simplistic and thus erroneous, images of a culture. (Jogan and Eaton,56)

The following example is from a textbook on Japan:

> All the Nakamuras sleep in one bedroom divided by a screen. The road to the house is not paved. There is a growing

list of appliances in the Nakamura home-an electric refrigerator,stove, toaster, and color television. Yet the bathroom is far from modern. The toilet is primitive and there is no shower.
(Cambridge,1971: The Asia Society,141)

What does the writer mean by "far from modern"? By whose standards? The Nakamura would probably have a few things to say about American culture if they had to live in the United States or Canada.

Helpful Hints

Classroom communicative activities can include exercises on culture-related topics.The following are some suggestions for start-up:

Activity 1(Discussion/Writing)

1. Oral warm-up:Class discusses possible cultural stereotypes using Realia from the target culture along with interviews of Foreign students or visitors about their reactions.
2. Group activity: Student compose questions to ask each other and students (or native speaker teachers) from other classes.
3. Topics are selected: Food problems.Linguistic problems. Body language, proxemics etc.
4. Using the specific questions and topics students conduct more interviews to gather data.
5. The final result is put into a "research paper" to be handed in, checked, rewritten and then possibly published in a class or school newsletter.

(adapted from Evans,78)

Lessons in any L2 include culture explicitly or implicitly. Food, for example, is a major cultural topic that can be used by a creative teacher to introduce the finer points of the target culture. Besides the usual names of main dishes and obligatory dialogue about ordering in a restaurant, the food unit can include a discussion or compare and contrast exercise based on a set of questions:

Activity 2 (Discussion/Writing)

1. What time of day is the main meal eaten?
2. What kind of food is eaten?
3. What kind of receptacles,utensils are used?
4. How is the food cooked, by whom,where?
5. How is the food served,by whom?
6. Where is the meal eaten?
7. Who eats with whom?Who eats separately? Who eats before or after whom?
8. Does everyone eat the same food, the same amount of food?

..... (McLeod,545)

The next activity introduces the Spanish system of names in a somewhat amusing dialogue:

Activity 3 (Listening Comprehension/Role-Play)

The following takes place in a small town in Spain... A friend has called Mr. Michener to inform him that there is a letter for him at the post office. But when Mr. Michener goes to pick the letter up,the following strange situation develops:

Michener: Good day sir.I came to pick up my mail.

Employee: Good day. Do you have your passport?

Michener: Here it is.

Employee: Thank you. Just a minute please.(A few minutes pass)

Employee: I'm sorry. But there is nothing for you, sir.

Michener: That's impossible.I'm sure there's a letter here for me. Please go look again.

Employee: I'm sorry,Senor Albert. I can't find anything for you.

Michener: Excuse me,sir. My name is James Albert Michener.Perhaps if you look in the file under M you'll find it.

Employee: Please Senor Albert. I know what I'm doing.

There is nothing here for you.

Michener: But sir, if you will listen to me for a moment,I'm sure there's a letter for me in the file M.

Employee: Senor Albert, I'm losing my patience. I have told you that we have not received a single letter for you.

(Michener telephones some friends and returns shortly. Soon his friends arrive and explain everything to the employee)

Employee: You in the United States have very strange names. In Spain we have two *APPELLIDOS* (surnames):the first is the paternal name,the second is the maternal name. We use our paternal surname.Pardon me Senor Albert, for the inconvenience."(Omaggio 384-5,from IBERIA, James Albert Michener)

Learners discuss the system of Spanish names putting themselves into similar situations and writing up their own little dialogues where confusion may result(checking into a hotel for example).

Activity 4 (Reading)

In this situation a traveler in Germany is surprised by the train system:

On a Train in Germany

Susan was traveling from Hamburg to Frankfurt. The train ride was rather long,so she decided to buy a ticket for a " *liegewagen* ". It was only slightly more expensive than the regular ticket and she would be able to get a good night's sleep. When she entered the compartment, she was surprised to see four men and a lady already seated there. Since she could see no beds, she assumed that later on they would go to another compartment, with the men separate from the women. Imagine her astonishment when the porter came,folded down the seats so that they formed six bunk beds and gave everyone a pillow and a blanket! She sat upright on her bunk bed, not sleeping all night,afraid of the men. Why was Susan upset?

1. The German ticket agent had cheated her and sold her the wrong ticket. 2. She thought that she should have moved to the correct compartment and she was angry at herself for not doing so.
3. She had confused the concept of a " *liegewagen* " with that of a " *schlafwagen* " .
4. Germans have very loose morals and she might have been the object of "improper" behavior." (Seelye,1984,pp.122-3;Omaggio,398-9)

Number three is correct. She confused the two types of sleeping cars. In a " *liegewagen* " one does not have a private compartment and strangers ignore each other while the " *schlafwagen* " is similar to the American Pullman car.

Activity 5 (Conversation)

An article (a fez for example) is brought to class and discussed.

1. Describe the object.

2. How was it made? By hand or machine.
3. What is its purpose?Who uses it?
4. What role does it play in the culture?
5. What facts can be determined from the culture by studying this object? 6. Compare it with something similar in your culture.
7. Would the culture be any different if this did not exist? (adapted from Omaggio,393)

An article of clothing can prompt a discussion of target culture shopping:

Activity 6 (Conversation/writing)

Buying clothes :

1. How much is a sweater in this city?(Paris,Munich,Cairo)
2. What's expensive for a sweater?
3. What's cheap?
4. Are clothes cheaper or more expensive in.....than in the US?
5. Which are cheaper?
6. Which are more expensive?
7. Where can you buy a new/dress/coat/etc?
8. What size do you wear?(Convert your size to centimeters) (adapted from Bodman and Lanzano,102)

The following terms are culture specific to American sales. A good activity would be imagining that someone from the L2 is visiting on a homestay program and you need to give an explanation of these concepts which are then contrasted to the L1 concepts of shopping and sales:

Activity 7 (Oral Report)

Pierre will be visiting from France. Prepare a presentation explaining the following concepts so he will be able to have a good shopping experience!

1. One-day sale
2. Semi-annual sale.
3. Half-price sale.
4. White sale.
5. Manufacturer's close-out sale.
6. Chain store.
7. Good(bad) buy.
8. Coupons
9. Flyers.
10. Warehouse clearance

(adapted from Carver and Fotinos,33)

These questions can be asked in a French class:

1. In France, who does the shopping?
2. How often do stores have sales?
3. Do the French prefer a large department store or smaller specialty shops?
4. Does one pay a fixed price or bargain?
5. What is the most common way of paying?

What to Avoid

What seems humorous in a dialogue or story can be painful if it happens to you. Culture shock can lead to loneliness, hostility and frustration if not anticipated. Brown(2),158) The experiences of an American traveling to Spain to work confirm the need for cultural training in the language class. She had studied Spanish for six months,

and here is her first impression:

> You don't even know how to operate the telephone because you don't see any coin lots. You assume business hours are 9-12;1-5 so you call at 2. (Wagner,10)

> At 2 no one will be in the office since it is " *siesta* " time. As for the phones, the coins go into a groove at the top. Another problem is finding a place to live. Obviously the process differed from the dialogues given in the Spanish 1 book:

> Meanwhile my husband and I started calling numbers listed under " *piso* "(apartment) in the paper. My six months of Spanish hadn't prepared me for that experience. (Wagner,10)

She could not get a direct answer whether the apartment was rented or not receiving instead a host of details beyond her proficiency level."Why couldn't the Spanish speak as slowly and clearly as my Spanish instructor?"(p.10)

The examples underscore the necessity for cultural orientation in foreign
language (and ESL) teaching. The sample exercises show how culture can be easily integrated into the curriculum in a way that is interesting and constructive for the learners.

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